ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0057]   A communication network is arranged in a ring configuration of network elements (12) coupled by working spans (16) associated protection spans (18), with multiple rings sharing network elements (12a and 12b). A shared protection span (18ab) is coupled between pairs of shared network elements (12a and 12b). A matrix 28 in a shared network element (12a or 12b) can couple any channel from one of the incoming working spans or protection spans to any channel of the shared protection span (18ab).